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THE MUSICAL TIMES,

And Singing Class Circular.

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INCIDENTS IN THE LIFE OF BEETHOVEN.

By R. M. HAYLEY.

To all true lovers of music the name of Beethoven must ever be a household word. The wonderful creations of his genius possess a charm peculiarly their own, and are known and valued wherever the art of music, of which he was so great an ornament, is cultivated and understood. The life of this extraordinary musician presents details of a varied character, — combining at one and the same time, commanding genius, and strange eccentricity. Unlike Mozart, he was no infant prodigy, astonishing the world by his precocious powers. His wonderful ability for music was, however, early discovered, and required time for its development; but, by the force of his genius, he awakened in his countrymen a recognition of his merits, and the judgment of his contemporaries has been since fully confirmed in proportion as his works are more known and studied.

Ludvig van Beethoven sprang from a musical family. His grandfather had distinguished himself as a writer of musical dramas and operas, and his father, at the time of his birth, held the appointment of tenor singer in the Chapel of the Elector of Cologne. The family had originally come from Maestricht, in Holland, where the name is by no means uncommon in the present day, and was at this time residing at Bonn, where, on the 17th December, 1770, the great musical composer, on whose life we are now entering, first saw the light. Until recently there has been some uncertainty as to the exact year; and even Beethoven himself always placed the date of his birth two years later than we have done; but the matter has been now set at rest by the researches of Fétis père. The mistake has arisen from Beethoven having had an elder brother, who died in his infancy, with the same Christian name; but on consulting the baptismal registry of his native town, it appears that Beethoven was born as above stated, and his name-sake brother twenty months earlier. Besides these two sons, his father had two younger children, both boys. The elder of the two ultimately became a violinist, and the other studied surgery. Both of them followed their brother to Vienna, where he himself spent the greatest part of his life.

It has been stated by a well known authority (Choron and Fagolle's *Dictionnaire des Musiciens*) and, consequently, often repeated, that Beethoven was the natural son of Frederick William II., King of Prussia. He appears himself to have been aware of this story, for in writing to an old friend towards the close of his life, he says:—"This report was mentioned to me long since, but my principle has always been neither to write about myself, nor to take any notice of what others write about me, and therefore I willingly leave to you the vindication of the honour of my parents, especially of my mother." The story in fact has not a vestige of foundation, and all the facts respecting Beethoven's birth and parentage militate against the truth of it. It is a strange circumstance that Beethoven at first did not, although possessing so much precocious aptitude, indicate the desire to learn which would have been expected in one who afterwards distin-

guished himself so much in the study and practice of it. At least, it is recorded by Fétis père, in his life of Beethoven, on the authority of M. Baden, of Bonn, who was Beethoven's companion from infancy, that his father was obliged to use violence to urge him to the cultivation of his art, and that he rarely took his place at the piano, except under compulsion. From other sources we learn that a devotion to music very soon supplanted every other idea in his mind; and that his great delight as a child was to listen to his father's performance on his favourite instrument, for which purpose he would leave the society of his playmates. It was not till his fifth year that his father seems to have commenced with him a course of instruction, and the two stories may be reconciled by the well-known fact that the treatment of him by his father from this time, was such as to give him an actual distaste for that sublime art which had previously so entranced him. Under the influence of drink, to which he was addicted, his father abandoned himself to paroxysms of fury which knew no bounds; and, anxious as he was to bring up his son to the practice of music, nearly defeated his own ends by his intemperate conduct, and all but deprived the world of the pleasures which the wonderful compositions of his gifted son are calculated to inspire.

After Beethoven had overcome the obstacle so early presented to the pursuit of that study for which he was by nature so pre-eminently endowed, he made rapid progress in the prosecution of his studies. The best part of his musical education was received from the bandmaster of a Bavarian regiment of the name of Pfeiffer, and he remembered with gratitude in after years the advantages he had derived under his tuition, and relieved his necessities at a time when he stood in need of his assistance. His aptitude for the study of music soon began to attract attention in his native city, and Von der Eden, one of the most distinguished violinists in Bonn, took a lively interest in his progress, giving him gratuitous instruction as far as his own numerous avocations permitted; but when the boy's talents were brought under the notice of the Elector, Max Franz, the latter desired Von der Eden to give him an hour's instruction every day at his own expense. From this time Beethoven made such rapid strides in the art of music, that his performances in the Chapel of the Elector's palace, elicited great applause. He was now placed under the tuition of Neefe, a celebrated composer of the day, who had received the appointment in the Elector's Chapel, rendered vacant by the death of Von der Eden.

His new master, failed not to discover the remarkable genius of the pupil whose education he had undertaken, and in place of confining him to the study of inferior compositions, sought to introduce him, without delay, to the grand conceptions of Bach and Handel. The works of these great composers warmed the imagination of the youthful artist; and he always retained for them so fervent an admiration, that he never mentioned their names, but with the highest reverence. In his eleventh year he had learnt to perform Sebastian Bach's "Well-tempered clavichord" with such admirable taste and precision, that his playing rivalled that of many distinguished professors. It was this early acquaintance with the works of so profound a musician that gave to Beethoven that ease and rapidity in execution which distinguished his performance on the piano in after years. He had commenced composition so early as

his ninth year, and after a study of thorough-bass, to which Neefe then directed him, he found that greater success attended his efforts. Amongst these earlier juvenile attempts are some variations of a march, three *Sonatas* for the piano, and a few German songs. Most of them abound with such serious infringements of the laws of harmony, that Beethoven, at a later period of his life, was so ashamed of these defects, that he disclaimed being their author. His wonderful power of improvising was at this time remarkable, and the fertility of his imagination excited the admiration of all who heard him. Gerber (*Neues Lexikon der Tonkünstler*) relates that the composer Junker on hearing him extemporize at Cologne on a theme he had given him, expressed great astonishment at the marvellous powers of invention by which his performance was distinguished.

At the age of fifteen, through the influence of the Count of Waldstein, who was not only a great connoisseur, but a practical musician, Beethoven was appointed organist in the Elector's Chapel at Bonn. This nobleman early appreciated the great abilities of the young musician, and the interest which he exerted in his favour was abundantly justified by the manner in which the duties of his new office were discharged. He exhibited the same mastery over the organ, as he had formerly done over the piano, and continued to astonish everybody by the extent of his intuitive genius and inventive power. Whilst still a pupil of Neefe, and assisting him in the musical department of the Elector's Chapel, he paid a short visit to Vienna, in order to hear Mozart, whose music he greatly admired, to whom he carried some letters of recommendation. This occurred about the year 1790. He played extempore before Mozart, who paid very little attention to the performance, imagining it to be a piece learnt by heart. At last the young musician, piqued by this indifference, begged Mozart to give him a subject. Mozart muttered to himself, "Well, stay a little, let me try your metal," and wrote down a chromatic fugue subject which, taken backwards, contained a counter subject for a double fugue. Beethoven, though knowing little of the science, was not taken in. He worked upon the subject, the hidden properties of which he immediately discovered with such force, originality, and genius, that his hearer, more and more confounded, and almost breathless with attention, at last rose, and walking on tiptoe into the adjoining apartment where some of his friends were sitting, said to them, with great emotion, "Attend to that young man; you will hear of him one day."

In order to gain a livelihood Beethoven was obliged to have recourse to teaching, and by this means he was introduced to an amiable family at Bonn, of the name of Brenning. This acquaintance exercised a beneficial influence on his character, and assisted materially towards his intellectual improvement. Madame de Brenning was the widow of a Court Councillor, and had three sons and a daughter, who was afterwards married to Dr. Wegeler, and is affectionately mentioned in Beethoven's correspondence with him, under the name of Leonora. To this daughter he dedicated his first variations for the piano. Throughout life he cherished a fond remembrance of the happy days he had spent in that family, the members of which seem to have always retained a sincere affection for him. Harshly treated by his father, he was happy in being domesticated

amongst such kind friends. Madame de Brenning's maternal kindness won his heart, and she gained an ascendancy over his wayward spirit which no other person ever possessed. In one respect only her influence failed; she never could conquer his repugnance to give lessons in music. The drudgery of teaching was intolerable to him, and, except in the case of the Brenning's, where friendship and gratitude made him punctual, he used to shuffle out of it as best he could. One day Madame de Brenning having urged him very much to go and give his usual pianoforte lesson at the Austrian Ambassador's, who lived opposite her house, Beethoven went away for that purpose; but when he arrived at the Ambassador's door, his natural dislike to teaching got the better of him, and he returned to Madame de Brenning, saying to her, "For God's sake, madam, don't insist on my giving this lesson to-day. I will give two to-morrow." This antipathy accompanied him through life; and, indeed, he never had any pupils (at least whom he acknowledged as such), but the Archduke Rudolph and his friend, Ferdinand Ries. It was during his intimacy with the Brenning family that he first imbibed a taste for literature, his father being so entirely engrossed with music that he never encouraged any other kind of study. The direction which Beethoven's mind now took was permanent, and he acquired a taste for reading, which continued with him to the end of his life.

Late in the year 1791 Beethoven was appointed one of the Elector's private musicians, and was thus brought into contact with the most celebrated performers of the day, whereby his own fame was greatly extended. In the month of July, 1792, Haydn passed through Bonn on returning from his first visit to England, and the Elector's choir invited him to a breakfast at a place of resort near the town. On this occasion Beethoven showed him a Cantata of his own composition, and desired his opinion of it. The illustrious veteran praised it highly, and gave him every encouragement to pursue a career he had so well begun. This piece, however, was never published, nor ever performed, being found too difficult, especially for the wind instruments. He thus showed, at the very outset, that disregard of mechanical facilities which has always been an impediment to the satisfactory performance of his music. In the judgment of one of his contemporaries, the performances of Beethoven on the pianoforte, and for which he afterwards became so famous, were, at this time, not without a certain harshness and want of finish. He had little acquaintance with any distinguished player; but an opportunity now presented itself of appreciating those finer touches which distinguish the consummate artist. Having accompanied the Elector's Choir to Aschaffenburg, he was introduced by some friends to the choirmaster, Sterkel. This celebrated musician was the first to make Beethoven aware of the deficiency in his performances as respected taste and delicacy. He was himself by no means a powerful player, but the grace and precision of his style were remarkable. When he sat down to the pianoforte Beethoven stood behind him motionless, with his eyes riveted on the keys, admiring the delicacy of touch which characterized the player. Conversation having arisen on an air with variations which Beethoven had recently published, Sterkel, in allusion to its extreme difficulty, expressed a doubt as to whether even the author himself could satis-

factorily execute it. Notwithstanding Beethoven's repugnance to play in public, feeling piqued at the remark, he sat down at the instrument without the piece before him, which had been unfortunately mislaid. He then began to play such variations as he could recollect, adding others extempore in such a manner that Sterkel and everybody present were astonished; and what was the more remarkable in this improvisation was that Beethoven, suddenly adopting Sterkel's style of execution, played with a neatness and a delicacy which he had never before exhibited. The disinclination of Beethoven to perform before others, to which we have above alluded, was a peculiarity which he carried with him through life. "He used to come to me," says one of his friends, "gloomy and out of temper, complaining that he had been forced to play, even though the blood tingled in his fingers. I endeavoured to calm and amuse him, and then the conversation dropped. By and by, whilst talking to me, he would sit down upon the stool that stood in front of the piano, and whilst apparently looking the other way would carelessly run over the keys, and evoke the most agreeable melodies. I dared not make any remark, and he would ultimately take his leave in a very different mood from that in which he first entered my room." This reluctance to play before others was not always so easily overlooked, and oftentimes occasioned a degree of coldness between Beethoven and his friends.

Notwithstanding the favourable commencement of Beethoven's acquaintance with Haydn, their subsequent intercourse turned out anything but agreeable. In the year 1792 he was sent by his constant friend and patron the Elector of Cologne to study at Vienna, under the greatest musician of the age. Under this master Beethoven was introduced to the study of the works of the best composers; and Haydn entertained a great affection for his promising pupil, whose progress he marked with the greatest interest. It was the wish of Haydn that Beethoven should acknowledge himself as his pupil in the title page of his earliest publications. To this Beethoven demurred, saying that he had never taught him anything. When he had finished his first work—a set of trios for the pianoforte, violin, and violoncello, and published at Vienna in 1795—he played them at Prince Lichnowsky's, before a party of the principal musicians of Vienna. Haydn was present amongst the rest, and joined in the applause bestowed by the company on these charming productions. He however took the author aside, and advised him most unaccountably not to publish the third of the set, the well known trio in C minor. Beethoven, who knew well that this was the best of the three, paid no regard to the advice; and when he found his own opinion confirmed by the judgment of the public, he conceived the notion, which never afterwards left him, that Haydn had been actuated by a spirit of jealous rivalry. This he never forgave, nor did he ever lose the opportunity of making Haydn and his music the subject of ill-natured remarks and criticisms. When Haydn took his departure again for London, he committed his pupil to the care and instruction of Albrechtsberger, a celebrated professor of counterpoint, but Beethoven submitted to Albrechtsberger's authority with scarcely more patience than to that of Haydn. His new master was a profound theorist, and taught the science in all its scholastic rigour—a method of tuition quite unsuitable to the modern state of the art. The impetuous pupil was obliged

to bend under the yoke of antiquated rules which he felt to be mere pedantry, and was constantly led by his ardent imagination to disregard. He was continually therefore committing errors, which his teacher assiduously endeavoured to correct. Hence arose many disputes between master and pupil, although to Beethoven's credit, it must be said, that he never lost sight of the respect and esteem due to his venerable instructor. The exercises which he wrote under the eye of his master were preserved, accompanied by observations of his own on the absurdity of some of the theories by which it was sought to restrain his lively imagination. These exercises, and the sarcastic remarks in which Beethoven indulged upon them, were published at Vienna after his death, under the title of "Beethoven's Studies in Thorough Bass;" and, though a worthless publication, is still curious, as showing the supreme contempt Beethoven had for the tasks imposed upon him. The rules, taken down of course from Albrechtsberger's mouth, are sometimes so obscurely, inaccurately, and even unintelligibly expressed, that the pupil evidently did not comprehend their scope; and in the examples, instances of bad harmony, false answers to subjects of fugue and other errors are to be detected in almost every page." "Beethoven," says Fétis, "was not, as has been supposed, unacquainted with the science of music, but the science was too circumscribed for his views." It appeared to thwart his most congenial views, and he never was able to become familiar with it. In some of his remarks he is very amusing. There is a chapter on *Canon*, for instance, containing examples of this kind of composition in all its absurd and puzzling varieties. In his enumeration of them he mentions, "the numerical and enigmatic canons which, like every thing that partakes of the nature of a riddle, are easier to invent than to solve, and seldom yield any compensation for the time and trouble bestowed upon them. In former times, he adds, people took a pride in racking their brains with such contrivances; but the world is now grown wiser." It was thus that Beethoven ridiculed in conversation the strict precepts of the schools. When any infringement of them in his compositions was pointed out to him by his friends, he would term them a set of pedants, and rejoin, laughing, "Oh, yes, you are quite astonished and confounded, because you cannot find this in one of your treatises on harmony!" During his residence at Vienna, Beethoven did not cease to indulge in pleasing recollections of the happy days he had spent with the Brenning family, in his native city. Much of the correspondence which he had with them is preserved, especially his letters to Leonora, the friend of his youth, to whom he was able to express his feelings without reserve. On sending to her some variations on the *aria* in Mozart's *Figaro*, *Se vuol ballare*, which he had dedicated to her, he thus writes:—"I only wish that the work were of more importance, and more worthy of you. I have been tormented here to publish it, and I have availed myself of the opportunity to give you a proof of my regard and friendship, and of my constant remembrance of your family. Accept this trifle from one who highly esteems you. If it afford you any pleasure, I shall be amply satisfied. Let it be a *souvenir* of the time when I passed so many, and such happy hours in your house. It will perhaps serve to keep me in remembrance till I see you again, which I fear will not be soon." After asking her to work him a waistcoat, in token of their friendship, that he might receive a gift from

"one of the best and most estimable girls in Bonn," he returns to the subject of the variations. "They will be," he says, "somewhat difficult to play, especially the quavers in the coda. Let not that frighten you. I have so managed it, that you need not play anything more than the quavers; the other notes may be left out, since they are in the violin part. I should never have done anything of the kind, had I not observed that there were some persons in Vienna who, after hearing me extemporize a fantasia in the evening, would, on the morrow, note down some of my peculiarities, and pass them off as their own. So, as I foresaw that these plagiarisms would soon appear in print, I resolved to be beforehand with them. I had also another motive, namely, to puzzle the pianoforte professors here, many of whom are my deadly enemies, and I was not unwilling to take this revenge, because I foresaw that these variations when, from time to time, placed before them, would cause these gentlemen to make but a sorry appearance." In a subsequent letter he describes the feelings with which he had received a gift from this lady. "Acceptable as was the present, it awakened feelings of melancholy. It recalled former days, and made me ashamed of myself when I thought of your generous behaviour. In truth I did not believe that you still deemed me worthy of a place in your memory. Oh! could you have been a witness of what I felt yesterday, you would certainly not think it exaggeration, when I declare to you that the thought of you made me sad even to tears. I entreat you to believe that, however little I may appear to you to deserve belief, I have suffered, and still suffer, through the loss of your friendship. You and your dear mother I can never forget. You were so kind to me that such a loss is not to be soon compensated. I know what I lost. I know what you were, but . . . Ah! were I to fill up the blank, I should be obliged to revert to scenes which to you it would be unpleasant to contemplate, and to me painful to recall." After these touching allusions to agreeable associations of which he was no longer a partaker, he refers to a composition of his own by which the letter was accompanied, and towards the conclusion makes mention of an intimacy he had contracted with a kindred spirit whose kindly offices and friendly intercourse he retained during the remainder of his days.

(To be continued.)

THE HANDEL FESTIVAL.

By HENRY C. LUNN.

WHATEVER may be said of the adaptability of the Crystal Palace for the purposes of music, there can be no question that it has earned for itself a name for the presentation of the greatest works of Handel, which will cling to it for many years to come. The triennial gathering at this Summer Palace for the glorification of England's great oratorio composer, has become one of the institutions of the country; and even if critics should persistently assert that a large portion of the audience is attracted rather by the sight than the sound, the promoters of this gigantic undertaking may reasonably pride themselves upon being able to organize a Festival, in which the devotees of fashion shall be willingly taxed for the support of the devotees of art. And indeed there is much to be said for those who merely form part of this vast assemblage for the sake of seeing and being seen; for not only is the effect most beautiful when the sun lights up the variegated colours of the dresses in the audience part, but the orchestra, with its

four thousand vocalists and instrumentalists, is a sight to dwell upon with wonder and admiration, and to treasure up as a noble example of the perfection to which power can be subdued and controlled.

When we assert that the combined effect of band and chorus was far superior, in the Festival just concluded, to that in any one yet given in the Crystal Palace, every credit should be awarded to the energetic manager, Mr. Bowley, for it is to him that we are indebted for the idea of screening in the transept; a plan which, however disappointing to the many persons who relied upon catching the sound as it wandered through the building, was most gratefully accepted by those who had secured seats within a reasonable distance of the orchestra. And our remarks should have additional weight when it is considered that the place appropriated to the "press" was in a gallery, the centre of which was occupied by the back of the Royal box, and the sides of which were "reserved," and carefully guarded by policemen; so that those who came to write upon the performance, were compelled to secure one of the few available front seats two hours and a half before the performance began, or to stand at the back, in mute wonder at the immense number of ladies engaged in writing the musical notices for the public press.

The rehearsal on Friday, the 12th ult., was attended by an enormous audience; and although Mr. Costa, by occasionally repeating a portion of the music, did not ignore the fact of its being a rehearsal, it had all the effect of a performance, so perfectly were all the pieces given. The Festival commenced on the following Monday with the *Messiah*, preceded, according to custom, by the National Anthem. Where all must be praise, and the work to be criticised is one so dear to all who listen to, or read upon, the marvellous manner in which our Christian faith has been embodied in music, little new can be added to the many records of the performances of the *Messiah* in our former pages. The principal vocalists were Madlle. Titiens, Madame Sainton-Dolby, Madame Rudersdorff, Mr. Sims Reeves, and Mr. Santley. To commence with the choruses, the great feature at this Festival, it would be impossible to conceive anything finer than the quality of tone in the first grand choral demonstration, "And the glory of the Lord," the phrases in which were answered by the separate divisions of the choir, with an union of decision and power rarely attained by so large a body of vocalists. The two great choruses, "For unto us," and the "Hallelujah," produced more than the usual amount of effect, the latter especially being remarkable for a due observance of *crescendo* and *diminuendo*, too often, even in good choirs, mistaken for *forte* and *piano*. The same may be said of "All we, like sheep," and the final chorus, "Worthy is the Lamb," both of which were as much under the control of Mr. Costa's *bâton*, as if four hundred, instead of four thousand, performers had been engaged in its interpretation. We do not agree with the traditions which justify either the many omissions in this Oratorio, or the tampering with the solos, notable examples of which are the transferring of the bass air, "But who may abide the day of his coming" to a contralto, and the division of "He shall feed his flock" (intended by Handel to be sung by a soprano) into a meaningless one-verse display of tenderness of expression, for soprano and contralto. To those, however, who place the vocalists before the composer, Madame Sainton-Dolby as the contralto, and Madlle. Titiens as the soprano, must have been everything that could be desired. Madame Dolby's delivery of "He was despised," was also a thoroughly artistic rendering of this deeply pathetic air. Madlle. Titiens proved herself fully equal to the subdued religious sentiment of "I know that my Redeemer liveth," and the more florid, "Rejoice greatly," both of which were given in her very best style. Madame Rudersdorff sang the air, "How beautiful are the feet," with much feeling; and (with Mr. W. H. Cummings), was of the utmost service in the quartet, with chorus, "Since by man came death." Mr. Sims Reeves sang, as only he can sing, the quiet and